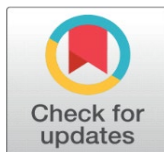


# THE GAME THAT DAY WAS A TIGER<sup>1</sup>: IMPLICATIONS OF TIGER-HUNTING EPISODES IN SELECT AMAR CHITRA KATHA GRAPHIC HISTORICAL BIOGRAPHIES<sup>2</sup> CONCERNING INDIAN RULERS

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## ABSTRACT

*Amar Chitra Katha*, being comics and described by its makers as a route to Indian roots, has replaced the stereotypical western comic book superheroes by narrating and celebrating native heroes fetched from Indian history, mythology, legends and folk culture satisfying the needs of comic-book adventurism as well as an education achieved through entertainment. The *Amar Chitra Katha* 'heroic' graphic historical biographies were not merely intended to be a source of historical knowledge about India but also an inspiration to emulate the ideals of such heroes of native history. The present paper is a study of graphic visualizations of certain episodes related to tiger-hunting in select historical titles of *Amar Chitra Katha*. The paper attempts to critically examine the politics of visual aesthetics and graphic narration of historical facts related to the tiger-hunting available in such graphic historical biographies and thereby tries to diagnose whether such historical representations need to be analyzed with regard to the methodologies of representation involving postcolonial nationalist writing back or communal stereotyping and rewritten according to the pressing needs of the contemporary world concerning erosion of wildlife and anthropogenic natural disorder.

**Keywords:** Comics, Graphic Historical Biographies, Comic Book Heroes, Tiger-Hunting, Postcolonial, Communal Stereotyping, Wildlife, Anthropogenic Natural Disorder

<sup>1</sup> The line is from ACK Sher Shah [Rizvi & Chavan \(2014\) 13](#).

<sup>2</sup> Though it is debatable whether flesh-and-blood historical figures can be unquestionably made to appear as 'heroes' and 'heroines' and whether such 'heroic' narration does fully amount to be historically valid, ACK has celebrated figures from Indian historical pasts as comic-book heroes deviating from the western tradition of comic-book superheroes and has focused on historical biographies --- some of which are unlayered hagiographies while others turn layered and often critical of the central figures in question (see also [Thakurta \(2022\) 95-6](#)). It is not that ACK never came up with periodic history. *The Story of the Freedom Struggle* is definitely one of graphic periodic histories of ACK. I also place ACK historical titles within the scope of 'graphic history' and using the phrase as Nayar has used it even though Nayar does not include ACK historical titles in his discussion on graphic histories citing them to be 'heroic' [Nayar \(2016\) 47](#) and further citing McLain's claim that they naturally conflate the sacred and profane, mythological, and historical [McLain \(2009\) 18](#) that often defeats the purpose of objective and scientific history. I interpret ACK historical titles as graphic histories utilizing almost all attributes of multimodality, polyphony and aesthetic dynamism that graphic histories can offer in re-/mediating spoken, unspoken and unspeakable pasts often transcending the representational limitedness of academically and alphabetically written histories (see also [Thakurta \(2022\) 95-6](#)).

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The present article deals with certain *Amar Chitra Katha* (hereafter ACK) historical titles such as *Sher Shah*, *Akbar*, *Tipu Sultan*, *Rani Durgavati* that are essentially not about tiger-hunting. Tiger-hunting visualizations only form episodes in the graphic narration about the lives and struggles of the historical figures that these comic-book histories retell and reimagine. A hunting episode does believably heighten the visual sensationalism and adventurism in comic-book narrations. It would be erroneous to assume that ACK did only visualize a hunting episode for the sake of mere historical accuracy. At the same time, while they adequately satisfy the needs of visual glamour and adventurism, their occurrences serve functions that are far superior to and different from mere adventurism or graphic decoration. I choose to see the visualizations of tiger hunting episodes as aesthetic practices reflective of and connected to the larger and more complex web of politics associated with ACK's handling of Indian history. Thus, three main queries drive me in my critical appraisal of these tiger-hunting episodes --- one, how such episodes and their graphic narrations are integrally connected to ACK's methods of delegitimizing the imperial and Orientalist stereotypification of native rule and rulers; two, how they as verbal-visual narrations of native heroes differentiate in tonality and thematic thrust between Hindu and Muslim rulers of India or specific Indian regions; three, whether these graphic narrations of hunting episodes reflect an effectively ecocentric attitude towards the non-human.

Even before we come to the subject of visualizations of tiger-hunting in select ACK graphic historical biographies it is important to reiterate the cultural politics behind the genesis of ACK and what India's most celebrated comics brand sought to celebrate in an act of deviating from the standard models of comic-book narration available in Western comics that were often the only constituents of the comics-diet for the Indian children prior to the beginning of ACK in 1967 and its cultivation of absolute Indian subjects since 1969. It is not possible to adequately interpret and critically appreciate ACK without acknowledging the nature of its politics of aesthetic utterance. As the ACK graphic biography of Anant Pai presents, Pai was disturbed by the fact that Indian youngsters of 1960s knew 'all about Greek mythology' but they did not 'know much about our own heritage' [Chandrasekaran & Kadam \(2012\) 16](#). One of the greatest achievements of Anant Pai, more famously known as 'Uncle Pai', was to introduce characters and personages from Indian sacred texts, mythologies, and histories as comic-book superheroes/heroines rather than producing any fictitious comic-book superhero. This was one way of Indianizing the comic-book that definitely made its appearance in India through the processes of cultural encounter in the colonial and neo-colonial contexts. Additionally, according to him ACKs 'were educational comics' that were 'contributing to a child's growth' [Chandrasekaran & Kadam \(2012\) 24](#). By replacing the western comic-book stereotypes of heroes with Indian historical or mythological figures, Pai chose not merely to retell Indian stories but also tried to stimulate Indian children so that they get sensitized about their cultural roots as well as emulate the 'heroic' virtues of the heroes glamorized in ACK. The present paper deals with few historical titles of ACK. ACK historical titles, that were even included in school curriculums, were necessarily for dissemination of historical knowledge about Indian historical figures but they need to be also identified as texts written in the verbal-visual medium of comics meant to be consumed for entertainment and delight of the children. Thus, it must be clearly identified that though ACK did not invent any fictitious hero for its comic-book narrations and

retold stories of Indian historical figures, it continued to focalize on 'heroism' of historical personalities who were now presented as comic-book heroes. Objective historiography and its supposed scientific rationale may not sanction any such characterization of historical figures as unquestionably 'heroic' or 'villainous'. However, ACK blends comic-book super-heroic adventurism and dissemination of historical knowledge with its aim of contributing to a child's growth. Thus, as a children's literature brand of graphic historiography it was supposed to enlighten and entertain at the same time; and the ACK historical titles that were mostly layered or unlayered hagiographies of native Indian rulers of the pre-colonial or colonial era, needed to craft out of real-life historical figures and their struggles the epitome of 'super-heroism'. In this regard, it must be understood that ACK needed to invent a way of graphic narration by which it could adequately emphasize the facets of heroism personified by the historical figures. Central to the method of characterizing the 'hero' and the 'heroic' is the process of characterizing the hero's adversary. The graphic historical biographies that this paper chooses to discuss are in no way focusing on the hero or the heroine's struggle against any non-human being. However, the hero or the heroine's acts of hunting the wild carnivore in the form of the tiger appear as a visual iconography of the nature and scope of the 'super-heroic' traits that they personify. Moreover, the graphic visualization of such acts of valour was definitely meant to satisfy the need of adventurism in comic-books. In this regard it is important to locate the fact that ACK chose to focus on the heroics of Indian rulers to resist amnesia about Indian heroes with which the Indian children were infected as a natural result of western cultural imposition. A tiger is most commonly stereotyped as a fierce and violent carnivore and a human being's ability to have power over it or to vanquish it is often understood as a mark of his/her unquestionable supremacy and valour. Having power over the tiger would naturally serve certain symbolic functions with regard to the validation of political rule of one person or race over the others. Thus, though the ACK historical titles that celebrate native rulers talk much about the native ruler's engagements with other human adversaries and relevant affairs of family and state the tiger-hunting episodes add to the characterization of the hero in them especially in the context of ACK's anti-imperialist and nationalist commitment regarding celebrating native heroes of Indian history as foils to the British colonizers. ACK's anti-imperialist commitment and tiger-hunting episodes and their historiography in the colonial era as per narrations done by the members of the colonial race form together the political and cultural context of ACK's aesthetics regarding visualization of tiger-hunting episodes. Thus, in order to highlight what such visualizations of tiger-hunting episodes add to the characterization of the heroes and heroines of Indian history in ACK, it is important to revisit the spectacles of British's tiger-hunting in India during the colonial period and highlight what such hunts symbolically and politically stood for in the context of imperial iconography.

It is useful to underline that an analysis of British colonial rule in India is incomplete without a critical estimation of various faces of green imperialism. Tiger-hunting by the British colonizers during the colonial period in India, as a natural constituent of green imperialism thus had heterogeneous symbolic functions in the context of the imperial constructs and colonial encounters with native subjects:

*During the British Raj, 80,000 tigers, 150,000 leopards and 200,000 wolves were slaughtered. Sadul Singh, the Maharajkumar of Bikaner prided himself on killing 50,000 heads of animals and 46,000 game birds during the British Raj. These included as many as 889 nilgai, 86 tigers and lions and 1,670 gazelle and antelopes. Europeans used to take tiger heads and skins home as souvenirs before 1947. Prakash (2006) 699.*

It is not that before the British, tigers were not hunted. Jahangir is believed to have personally killed eighty tigers while his son Shah Jahan regularly hunted tigers for amusement [Sramek \(2006\) 660](#). Tigers were hunted by the British for sport, revelry, an exhibition of power and masculinity and to justify various imperialist discourses and discursive stereotyping of the native rulers, people, and natural world. For example, Susie Green writes that 'Western imperialists built up a reputation for the tiger that was almost entirely malign' and the iconography produced a portrait of the tiger being one of a 'foul, fearsome and vicious killer' (quoted in [Crane & Fletcher \(2014\) 369](#) and in the context of such imperialist iconography, hunted tigers 'also represented for the British all that was wild and untamed in the Indian natural world' [Sramek \(2006\) 659](#). [Allingham \(1857\)](#) It is not exceptional to find the mutineers of 1857 being identified with a Bengal tiger in the famous *Punch* cartoon 'The British Lion's Vengeance on the Bengal Tiger' where the British lion is seen pouncing on the tiger to devour it; the Indian mutineers, identified with the tiger, stand for the vicious, unmanageably wild and untameable violent agency and thus tiger hunting, in general, would signify and legitimise, as says W. K. Storey, 'the triumph of culture over nature and of colonizer over colonized' (quoted in [Sramek \(2006\) 662](#). On the other hand, 'In imperial representation, Indian hunting came to be seen as wasteful and cruel while the British killing of animals, including the destruction of man-eating tigers, was supposedly regulated and defensive' [Das \(2009\) 20](#). It is central to the justification of colonial violence that the colonizer exhibited his masculinity and showcased his identity as a fierce protector of the native world even though he originated from a foreign land. This imperialist iconography is available even in the arena of the supposed children's literature adventure stories like *Tintin in Tibet* which visualizes how Tintin, the white protagonist, defends the oriental Chang, acting as a deliverer. The British masters wanted to stage themselves as valid successors of the great Mughals [Sramek \(2006\) 660](#) and tried to identify themselves as stronger and masculine defenders (compared to native rulers who were categorized as effeminate as per imperial narratives) of the native people who according to imperialist narrative lived a life of insecurity for being exposed to the dangers posed by man-eating tigers. Citing Ramusack, Sramek writes:

*... many Britons were more inclined simply to co-opt, if not in some cases supplant, the traditional roles of contemporary Indian rulers as benevolent protectors of Indian men, women, and children against tigers....* [Sramek \(2006\) 668](#).

As highlighted earlier, in an attempt to celebrate the indigenous Indian culture and history through comics and thereby countering and devouring the neocolonial cultural influence on the Indian children, ACK, under the guidance of Anant Pai, chose to retell glorious stories as a part of its strategy of drawing Indian children to their 'roots'. With an attempt to celebrate the indigenous Indian culture and history through comics and thereby to counter and devour the neocolonial cultural influence on the Indian children, ACK, under the guidance of Anant Pai, chose to retell glorious stories as a part of its strategy of drawing Indian children to their 'roots'. In the process, ACK managed to retell in graphic language the stories of mythical, legendary, and historical figures that were made to visually appear as inspiring portraits that were meant to stimulate the young learners to emulate the ideals that they proposed or reflected. Such a process of aesthetic graphic narration was necessary, in its post-independence and neo-colonial context amounts to graphic rewriting of Indian pasts from the point of view of the natives. Thus, if celebration of tiger-hunting done in the colonial narration of the same symbolically normalized the supremacy of the white master and imaged him as the rightfully masculine, benevolent protector of the native world, then the graphic narration of

the hunting scenes in ACK would serve certain common purposes of anti-imperial 'writing back'<sup>3</sup>. However, it will be erroneous to define such visualizations of tiger-hunting episodes as visualizations signifying one static and uniform narrative. Utilizing the grammar of comics, confronting the need for visual adventurism and sensationalism, and working with its ideologies and commitments, ACK tells heterogeneous, interdependent and independent 'stories' and 'versions' of the past through such visualizations. Pai himself had expressed his doubts regarding effectiveness of officially mediated and academically written history-textbooks. He thought that the conventional history books were nothing but 'a list of persons and places, and meaningless dates' (Quoted in [Sreenivas \(2010\)](#) 84. Moreover, the charge of discursive and communal stereotypification of Muslim rule and rulers against ACK is not a new one. According to Chandra, ACK, through the supposed verbal-visual entertainment achieved in comic-book narration and through its proclamation of aversion to conventionally and academically written and mediated histories wanted to 'correct' 'state version' of history in a 'masked manner' [Chandra \(2013\)](#) 41. Tiger-hunting episodes in the individual ACK graphic historical biographies as well as the historical biographies of different rulers having different religious identities can hardly be read in isolation if an accurate analysis of the politics of graphic narration is intended to be achieved. Thus, the visual iconography of tiger-hunting and its necessary implications are bound to differ among themselves when we compare the occurrences of such episodes available in graphic biographies of Hindu and Muslim rulers of India. At the same time, such visualizations inside the pages of ACK graphic histories need to be reevaluated in the present context of continuous erosion of wild-life in India and the entire world and such reevaluation and rethinking may lead us to an acknowledgement of the need for further rewriting of the same comic-book histories.

ACK *Anant Pai* presents Pai with a moment of epiphany where he sadly confronts the fact that:

*'Our children are exposed to books and ideas from the west, they are even forgetting to think like Indians!'* [Chandrasekaran & Kadam \(2012\)](#) 17

Pai's zeal to tell Indian stories of heroes and heroines was meant to represent a strategic counter to the normalized collective amnesia that native Indian children unconsciously suffered about Indian roots as a result of western cultural imposition and the continued monopoly of western models in the Indian comics market. It is important to note here that Pai chose to concentrate on comics because of their ability to 'convey the same thoughts in half the words' [Chandrasekaran & Kadam \(2012\)](#) 24 and the popularity of comics as a form of children's literature in contemporary India. Thus, comic-books with their multimodality and ability to entertain and educate at the same time represented for Pai a potent tool of cultural reawakening and since the visualization in comics or other visual arts leaves a lasting impression on the audience's mind than mere alphabetically written narratives such visualization of native glory through ACK's graphic history-telling was expected to stimulate the young audience more potently than literature unaided by visual illustrations. Thus, the visualizations of tiger-hunting in layered or unlayered graphic hagiographies of native heroes and heroines have conceived more forceful and stimulating narrations than those available in alphabetic narrations of the same.

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<sup>3</sup> I am using the phrase in line with the much-celebrated definition of postcolonial writing in originating from the people of under colonial rules and from the erstwhile colonies as available in the titular phrase of the anthology of critical writings on postcolonial works of literature edited by Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin.

There must be a thorough recognition of the fact that ACK hardly produced periodic historical narrations and concentrated on individual historical figures. At the same time, such historical figures belonging to various historical periods or ruling dynasties never appeared in ACK publications as part of a series one after the other according to the historical chronology of their appearance. Moreover, while hunting or more particularly big-cat or tiger hunting was a popular mode of entertainment and show of warrior-self of the rulers throughout the history of such ruling dynasties ACK did only occasionally visualize tiger-hunting as part of the visual narrative involving them.

I shall slightly deviate from the issue of tiger-hunting visualization while I begin critically locating the purposes served by such visualizations by coming to ACK *Vikramaditya* (1972), where Samudragupta's son Chandragupta in his formative years is seen hunting a lion. It has to be noted that Chandragupta, who later became known as Vikramaditya, is always presented as abler and stronger as a ruler and protector than his elder brother Ramagupta who is framed as weak and immoral and naturally jealous about the unquestionable prowess of his younger brother. This narrative is visually and verbally weaved right from the opening full-page splash that also serves as the title page of the comic. On that specific splash page, the narrative caption states:

*About 1,600 years ago, a vast part of India was ruled by a great king, Samudragupta. Pataliputra was its capital. The king had two sons --- Ramagupta and Chandragupta.* [Singh & Chavan \(2014\) 1](#)

Following merely the alphabetically written caption we hardly come across any facet that clearly distinguishes between the princes. The visual narrative clearly shows how inside the grand courtroom Samudragupta is seated on his throne and observes his sons. Ramagupta, placed in the left side of the frame, is physically idle with his arms backwards and Chandragupta is deeply committed to his martial prowess checking his tools of archery. It is visually indicated that Chandragupta, though younger than Ramagupta, is destined to serve as an abler ruler of the land than his elder brother, and thus, as one day, the suggestion of going to the riverbank and playing there comes before Chandragupta he encounters that with fearless readiness, while Ramagupta remains critical since 'the riverbank is haunted by wild beasts' [Singh & Chavan \(2014\) 2](#). As they appear before the king to seek permission, we see Chandragupta, rather than Ramagupta, who proceeds closer to their royal father who encourages them to certainly go to the riverbank without fear [Singh & Chavan \(2014\) 2](#). Finally, 'as they played on the riverbank' [Singh & Chavan \(2014\) 3](#), one of the playmates of Chandragupta warns the prince that a lion was approaching. The visual grammar clearly places Chandragupta as superior to Ramagupta since he is seen standing still while Ramagupta is seen running away. Chandragupta violently announces his firmness by standing his ground and as the alphabetic caption pauses after stating that 'As the lion attacked him, Chandragupta side-stepped' the visual completes the action of Chandragupta standing unaffected by the pouncing lion as he manages to kill it by a single clean sweep of his sword [Singh & Chavan \(2014\) 3](#). As others admire Chandragupta for his ability as a brave guardian, Ramagupta jealously exclaims that 'he was just trying to show off' [Singh & Chavan \(2014\) 3](#). It is important to note firstly that among the four frames of the page serializing the approach of the lion and its final hunting the actual hunting scene is within a smaller frame. Following the grammar of accentuation through larger frames in comics, it is not the actual killing of the lion but the bravery of young Chandragupta that is visually accentuated. Moreover, Chandragupta is not engaged in the delight of hunting or a mere exhibitor of physical prowess but is here presented as a protector of his mates whose arena is penetrated by the wild beast.

His victory over the lion may prove to be a victory of civilization over nature, a man over the wild non-human, but the visual focus is on his ability as a brave protector and foretelling how most deservedly as a ruler he shall ascend the throne in future years even though he was the younger of the two princes.

In *Sher Shah* (1974), unlike *Vikramaditya*, tiger-hunting is a natural and regular sport. Young Farid became 'Bihar Khan's most trusted friend, and often joined him on the hunt' Rizvi & Chavan (2014) 13, and on a day when the 'game' was a tiger, Sher Shah is seen first volunteering to hunt the tiger to prove his manliness and finally killing the roaring and fierce tiger ready to pounce on him, with his spear in the central full-width large frame of the comic-book page, which finally earns him the title 'Sher Khan' Rizvi & Chavan (2014) 13. It is important to note that the tiger in *Sher Shah*, is not presented as one that is naturally aggressive, and is not portrayed as a man-eater; it is ready to attack, but only when it is trying to defend itself. As available in the verbal-visual narration, unlike the lion in *Vikramaditya*, that had penetrated the human territory and was turning out to be a threat to the children playing on the river bank, in the case of the Muslim warriors like Bihar Khan and Farid, it is the human that penetrates the wild to dictate it, since the tiger in Farid's case was roaming harmlessly within its wild territory and even when Farid faced it with its spear, unlike the pouncing lion in Chandragupta's case, was only aggressively trying to attack Farid having detected itself a threat to its life caused by the warlike Farid with his spear Rizvi & Chavan (2014) 13. While the scene of tiger-hunting in *Sher Shah* at one level works as a spectacle of human civilization's mastery over the non-human wild world, the essential ethos of the visual narration is a combination of the spectacle of Farid, as a Muslim warrior, trying to truly showcase his masculinity and prowess by having power over the tiger and the regularization and normalization of violent 'game' of tiger-hunting by the Muslim warlords. In the case of *Vikramaditya*, the lion was not hunted for sport since the lion appeared as an aggressor and necessarily was a man-eater, while in the case of Bihar Khan and Farid, it is an object of sport. Following the same politics of visualization, in *Akbar*, the Mughal king is seen engaged in hunting tigers in one of the full-width frames of the comic-book where he is aided by his soldiers who are ready to kill the tiger if the emperor misses and his domesticated cheetah. As the narrative caption reads in the case of that particular frame:

*Leaving the heavy cares of state to Bairam, Akbar now led a pleasure-filled life. He was especially fond of hunting with Cheetahs, a very bloodthirsty sport. Patel & Kavadi (2014) 10.*

Significantly, in the manner of a layered visual hagiography, ACK places *Akbar* (1979) as a 'bloodthirsty' monarch who took 'pleasure' in hunting (as a 'sport') tigers that did not threaten people or the monarch at all. While Sher Shah and *Vikramaditya* encountered the tiger or the lion all alone, Akbar does only showcase his masculinity by being aided by his subordinates, and this places hierarchically *Vikramaditya* and Sher Shah as superior to Akbar, while in case of a comparison between Sher Shah and *Vikramaditya*, *Vikramaditya* is presented as superior to Sher Shah. In, *Shah Jahan*, 'Jahangir went on a tiger hunt, taking prince Khurram with him' Chinoy & Roy (2014) 5 and Jahangir is seen accompanied by his hunting troop. As a tiger is seen, 'the emperor jumped down from the horse to face the tiger' Chinoy & Roy (2014) 5 but did not try to kill it with a sword or a spear but tried to hunt it down by a gunshot from a distance. 'Then he took quick aim and fired --- but he missed' and 'the wounded and angry tiger leapt on the nearest man ... and begun to maul him', and it is then that 'quick as lightning, Khurram sprang to action' with his sword and tried to behead the tiger, but 'the enraged tiger released his victim and

prepared to spring upon the prince' who is saved by the timely intervention of one of the nobles who managed to shoot the tiger with his gun in 'the nick of time' [Chinoy & Roy \(2014\) 6-7](#). The serializing of the tiger-hunting episode in *Shah Jahan*, necessarily in a layered manner tries to formulate a discourse oppositional to academically written histories about the Mughal rulers' prowess in hunting tigers, as if trying to assert that while the Mughal rulers are credited with actual tiger-hunting they were perhaps less brave and less manly, especially about tiger-hunting, than their Hindu counterparts like the Rani Durgavati or Gond prince Dalpat<sup>4</sup>.

ACK rewrites, or at least attempts to rewrite, countering the academically mediated and supposedly 'glorious' history of Mughal prowess and tiger-hunting by visualizing how the monarchs and princes who only engaged themselves in tiger-hunting for their 'bloodthirsty sport' used to be aided and saved by their foot soldiers and the mechanical gun. By bringing in the visualization of the agency of the gun and other nobles and soldiers, ACK downplays the normative rendition of Mughals' supremacy in tiger-hunting and their role as protector of the land and people. If we compare the ACK graphic narrations of Mughal royal hunting and those of the Hindu monarchs, keeping in mind the fact that the researchers and creators of ACK were aware of how British colonizers admired the Mughal emperors' hunting skills and prowess and wanted to imitate them, we might see that ACK hierarchically places the Mughals as inferior to their contemporary Hindu counterparts as well as their Hindu predecessors. After all, Khurram appears nowhere close to young Chandragupta when we compare the two in terms of their prowess at big-cat hunting based on the ACK graphic narrations. While Akbar, Jahangir and Shah Jahan hunted for pleasure and were accompanied by battalions and modern weapons of warfare, Chandragupta slays the lion all alone and even Durgavati kills the tiger even though she was a woman. Incidentally, while Durgavati was in the eyes of Akbar a 'mere woman' [Chandrakan & Waeerkar \(2014\) 22](#) and though she is finally overpowered by the Mughals, ACK tactfully places Durgavati as superior to Akbar in her prowess, bravery, martial abilities, and her ability to guarantee the security and wellbeing of her people. Additionally, the scenes of young Khurram being saved by a mere noble and adult Akbar being accompanied by cheetahs and battalions of soldiers armed with trumpets and weapons placed beside young Chandragupta's prowess and hunting-skills seem to delegitimize the historical narratives that unequivocally proclaim stories of Mughal prowess. At the same time, though they had to suffer their positions as the subordinates or members of the defeated clans, the contemporary rivals and noblemen associated with the Mughals are appropriated as more effectual and powerful. The complete sequential narrative in *Shah Jahan* arranged in a grid of four democratic frames showing the hunting ends with a panel where young Khurram is praised by his happy and proud father Jahangir, while the rest of the frames as well as the wounded man in the background of the last frame of the background prove together how faulty the judgment made

<sup>4</sup> In *Rani Durgavati* (1976), the Gond Prince Dalpat, who is later married by Durgavati, showcases his bravery by embedding his arrows 'in the tiger's flesh' [Chandrakant & Waeerkar \(2014\) 3](#), during a regular hunting episode, and makes his father proud by shooting the tiger (which is nowhere described as a man-eater) for the sake of hunting with his arrow and hunting it down, proving himself 'manly' enough to 'marry a princess worthy of himself' [Chandrakant & Waeerkar \(2014\) 4](#). Similarly, proving the worthy wife of Dalpat and a worthier protector of the people, Durgavati kills a man-eater with her arrows and bullets while she flies onto the tiger violently [Chandrakant & Waeerkar \(2014\) 19-21](#). Durgavati, as a Rajputani, definitely is visualized as superior to the Gond king Dalpat through various means. The 'visual' vocabulary is meant to be a more powerful mode of communication than the 'alphabetic' vocabulary in comics. While 'the Rani was fond of hunting and like Dalpat her favourite game was the tiger' [Chandrakant & Waeerkar \(2014\) 18](#) she is not visually presented as a 'hunter' like Dalpat, since she kills the man-eater as it had penetrated the village of the people. Moreover, the masculinity of the Rani is further accentuated by the visualization of the hunting episode running for nine continuous frames covering three pages while Dalpat's hunting game only lasted for four frames covering one and a half pages. Thus, when Durgavati instructs the villager after killing the man-eater to send the skin to her [Chandrakant & Waeerkar \(2014\) 21](#), the tiger's skin serves as a symbol of Rani's exceptional hunting skill only in the context of saving her people. The methodology of appropriating the Rani as protector while she hunts is similar to ACK's characterization of Jim Corbett where he hunts the Champawat man-eater since it had killed so many people and the British officials instruct him to kill it [Nainwal & Bochgeri \(2012\) 16](#). This appropriation, alongside that of Vikramaditya as protector/hunter naturally delegitimizes the colonial narration involving Indian people living in insecurity and difficulty under the rule of weak and ineffectual monarchs.



by Jahangir actually appears [Chinoy & Roy \(2014\)](#) 7. Jahangir here definitely appears as the stereotype of the faultily praised Mughal ruler. Finally, the British colonizers' admiration and imitation of the Mughals is characterized as out-of-place and faulty.

It is of great importance that a gun is symbolically placed as a weapon imported from outside India and is naturally characterized as foreign. Incidentally, in the case of Tipu Sultan, who was another great hunter, the ACK graphic historical biography published in 1979, while returning from a regular hunting expedition the French Captain accompanying Tipu spots a tiger and prepares to kill it with a gunshot, Tipu intervenes stating 'Stop! We don't hunt tigers that way in Hindustan' and a larger full-width frame accentuates how 'even as the tiger prepared to pounce upon him, Tipu drew his sword' while the following two smaller square panels show how Tipu in his show of violent native hunter's self, kills the tiger with his sword [Rao & Naik \(2014\)](#) 14. In the process, ACK naturally places Tipu, a Muslim ruler fighting the British more 'Indian' with regard to the Mughals who had their rivals in the likes of Rana Pratap, the Rajputs, or Durgavati. Thereby, utilizing the flavour of children's literature that naturally demanded the visualization of physical adventure and variously characterizing such visual adventurisms ACK naturalizes what Nandini Chandra mentions as violent 'histories of othering' [Chandra \(2013\)](#) 42.

There is no denying the fact that ACK, in visually pronouncing and celebrating Indianness through comics through layered and un-layered graphic hagiographies, utilizes the tiger-hunting episodes as an exhibition of native prowess and rewrites history by seamlessly differentiating between the natures and purposes of tiger-hunting done by foreigners and native heroes and heroines. It also hierarchically lists such shows of 'heroic' adventurism using the template of tiger-hunting and thereby rewrites histories mediated by the imperial authority in a post-independent India. However, the needs of rewriting histories --- since histories serve often as inspiration and teach us what to follow and what to eliminate for a better future and since tiger-hunting episodes in ACK contribute wholesomely to the diet of visual adventure in comics wherein appear, heroes and heroines, for them to be emulated by children --- are endless especially when we rethink such comic-book adventure from the perspective of the contemporary ecological havoc, anthropogenic environmental disorder and shortage of wild species all across the world by the spread of urbanization, anthropogenic environmental degradation or an overarching presence of anthropocentric worldview in popular culture and academia that naturally places the non-human as ontologically inferior to human beings. Bindra most passionately and poignantly mentions:

*Wild animals are not a menace, they are co-habitants of this planet. Animals are not 'beastly', intentionally cruel, or have beastly morals --- they function as evolution ordained.*

*Biodiversity ensures a healthy planet, decreases the risk of environmental collapse. It may not need us, but our sustenance depends on a healthy, robust biodiversity* [Bindra \(2017\)](#) 277.

It is noteworthy to mention here that Pai himself had advocated in favour of ACK historical titles as effective learning tools since according to him the same with its proper utilization was destined to 'bringing about the desired change in behaviour' (Quoted in [Sreenivas \(2010\)](#) 85. In the present world of environmental degradation and anthropogenic natural disorder, this desired change in behavior in the Indian child must include an accumulation of sensitive harmonization with the non-human world especially when we recognize the fact that ACK histories were

meant to inform as well as inspire<sup>5</sup>. ACK had played and continues to play an iconic role in popularizing comics in and about India and has, since its inception, provided millions of Indians, especially kids, excessive entertainment and education, making itself one of the most trusted and responsible comics brands in the country. The heroes/ heroines showcased in ACK, no matter for what reasons they had hunted down tigers, and no matter what ideologies and purposes of writing history that such visualizations reflect in ACK, as part of its strategy to entertain and teach at the same time, they serve often as role-models from the past for contemporary Indian children, as a whole or in parts. The victory of human civilization and exhibition of the ruler's prowess is perhaps not contained in the spectacle of human being's act of overpowering the non-human and though these are historical facts and cannot be eliminated from history, their violent visualization and the marketed visual adventurism achieved through them can be potentially downplayed<sup>6</sup> through statutory warnings from producers and utilizing the means of multimodality and natural polyphony available in graphic histories to uphold a truly ecocentric approach which is the need of the present hour.

### CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

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<sup>5</sup> It will be not factually correct to state that the issue of tiger-hunting in ACK does not at all reflect effectively eco-sensitive and ecocentric in particular cases. In ACK *Jim Corbett*, the hagiographed super-heroic and philanthropic Corbett is presented as a 'friend of the wild' in the verbal-visual narrative available on the title's cover page. He is also presented as a friend of the Indians through several episodes that echo his philanthropy and kindness. Even when he kills the Champawat man-eater to protect helpless people threatened by the wild aggressor after thorough investigation of the tigress's carcass he finds out the mark of an 'old gunshot wound' in her mouth. Since she 'could no longer hunt her natural prey' she 'started feeding on humans'. Corbett finally concludes that 'She is not the enemy. The enemy is the hunter who wounded her for sport and then didn't bother to put her out of her misery' Nainwal & Bochgeri (2012) 23. This conclusion, coupled with the facial expression of Corbett and others who appear less relieved at the death of the tigress and more sympathetic towards the hunted wild beast, does reflect the signs of ACK's ecocentric handling of visualization of tiger-hunting episodes. While these visualizations offer to heighten the comic-book adventurism and exaggerate the super-heroism of the celebrated hunter, they definitely do not ignore an eco-sensitive appropriation of the same.

<sup>6</sup> Such ways of methodologically downplaying are made available throughout ACK historical titles. A prominent example is the case of ACK *Babasaheb Ambedkar* where ACK does not mention Ambedkar's ritualistic burning of the copies of *Manusmriti* as a mark of his protest against casteism and untouchability.

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